MARVEL COMICS®

THE GATHERING OF FIVE
PART TWO

THE AMAZING SPIDER-MAN®

THE RETURN OF THE MOLTEN MAN!™

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BYRNE KAYANAN LAROSA

A HOT TIME IN THE OLD TOWN

IT BEGAN LESS THAN AN HOUR AGO, AS **PETER PARKER** WOKE TO THE SOUND OF HIS BEDROOM **CLOCK RADIO**, AND A **NEWS REPORT** THAT **CHILLED** HIS BLOOD.

NOW HE LOOKS DOWN ON A TRAIL OF **DESTRUCTION** THAT DRAWS A **DEAD STRAIGHT** LINE ACROSS THE FACE OF **MANHATTAN.**

IT'S ***TRUE!*** THE NEWS REPORTS WERE ***RIGHT!***

AND IN THE FORTY-FIVE MINUTES SINCE I HEARD THE ***FIRST*** OF THEM, HE'S TRAVELED A ***MILE*** OR ***MORE*** FROM WHERE HE ***STARTED!***

THE AMAZING Stan Lee presents: SPIDER-MAN

THE GATHERING OF FIVE PART TWO

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WHATEVER HE'S ***UP TO*** HE DOESN'T SEEM TO BE INTERESTED IN ***STEALING*** ANYTHING!

THAT ***JEWELRY STORE*** HE JUST CARVED HIS WAY THROUGH HAS ENOUGH ***STONES*** ON DISPLAY TO MAKE A MAN A ***MILLIONAIRE*** WITH ONE ***GRAB!***

DIAMON

Future Perfect

NEWS

BUT ***WHAT*** HE'S DOING ISN'T SO ***IMPORTANT*** A QUESTION AS ***WHY*** HE'S DOING IT.

I THOUGHT HE'D GONE ***STRAIGHT.*** IF WORKING FOR ***NORMAN OSBORN*** CAN BE CONSIDERED ***GOING STRAIGHT!***

LOOK! IT'S ***SPIDER-MAN!***

DON'T TELL ME ***HE'S*** MIXED UP IN THIS, TOO!

NO -- THAT'S NOT ENTIRELY ***FAIR!*** OSBORN HAS LOTS OF ***LEGITIMATE*** HOLDINGS. WORKING FOR HIM DOESN'T AUTOMATICALLY PUT YOU ON THE WRONG SIDE OF THE ***LAW.***

UNLESS YOU HAPPEN TO BE THE ***MOLTEN MAN!***

AND ***THERE*** HE ***IS!***

$2.10

ICE CREAM

HOT DOG

TRASH

OKAY, RAXTON -- ENOUGH IS TOO MUCH!

WHAT SAY YOU AND ME SIT DOWN AND HAVE A LITTLE *CHAT?*

FREE

YOU CAN START BY TELLING ME HOW YOU PLAN TO ***PAY*** FOR ALL THE ***DAMAGE*** YOU'VE CAUSED! SOMEHOW I DON'T THINK ***OSBORN*** PAYS ALL ***THAT*** WELL!

HEY! RAXTON, I'M TALKING TO YOU!

HOLY...!

HE WOULD HAVE PLOWED RIGHT THROUGH ME LIKE I WASN'T EVEN ***THERE!***

HE'S MOVING LIKE A ***SLEEPWALKER...***

LIKE HE'S ***HYPNOTIZED*** OR SOMETHING!

Oh, NO!

THE STORE SPRINKLER SYSTEM! IT'S BEEN SET OFF BY THE SMOKE FROM THE BURNING CLOTHES!

AND THE WATER IS TURNING TO ***STEAM*** WHERE IT HITS RAXTON!

SCALDING STEAM!

EVERYBODY! GET OUT!

Oh! SPIDER-MAN!

ALWAYS A PLEASURE TO BE RECOGNIZED BY MY ADORING PUBLIC!

YOU'LL EXCUSE ME IF I DON'T ***HANG AROUND*** TO SIGN ***AUTOGRAPHS.***

FREE

DAILY BUGLE

BUT I HAVE TO GO MAKE THE WORLD SAFE FOR ***TRUTH*** AND ***JUSTICE*** AND ***LIKE THAT.***

HOPE I DIDN'T ***INFRINGE*** ON ANY ***COPYRIGHTS*** WITH THAT LINE!

NOW, LET'S PICK UP RAXTON'S TRAIL AGAIN. WHICH, BASED ON HIS ACTIONS SO FAR, SHOULD BE...

... EASY ENOUGH...

HOLY COW!

HE'S ***VANISHED!***

RABOY

TELEPHONE

"YOU KNOW WHY I'M HERE, OF COURSE?"

OF COURSE, I'VE BEEN ***EXPECTING*** YOU FOR SOME TIME.

2112

OPEN

IT CAN ***SENSE*** WHEN ITS ***BROTHERS*** AND ***SISTERS*** ARE ***NEAR,*** YOU KNOW. IT ***TOLD*** ME YOU WERE ***GATHERING*** THE ***OTHERS.***

"TOLD" YOU? YOU'RE NOT GOING TO PRETEND YOU CAN ***COMMUNICATE*** WITH THE THING?

Oh, NOT IN SO MANY WORDS. I DON'T SIT AND ***CHAT*** WITH IT, THE WAY ***YOU*** AND I ARE CHATTING HERE SO ***AMICABLY!***

BUT IT'S BEEN IN MY POSSESSION A ***LONG*** TIME. A ***VERY*** LONG TIME. LONG ENOUGH FOR THE TWO OF US TO COME TO A ***MUTUAL UNDERSTANDING.***

INDEED? AND HAD IT TOLD YOU ***WHY*** I AM GATHERING THE ***SHARDS?***

IT DIDN'T ***NEED*** TO. I ALREADY ***KNOW.*** WHY WOULD ***ANYONE*** GATHER THE SHARDS?

TO TAKE THE ***RISK.*** TO ***GAMBLE ALL*** ON A ***THREE***-IN-***FIVE*** CHANCE.

YOU'RE NOT THE ***FIRST*** TO TRY TO BRING THE SHARDS TOGETHER, ***Mr. OSBORN.***

YOU WON'T BE THE ***LAST.***

YOU'RE ***WRONG*** THERE, ***MAXWELL.*** I HAVE EVERY INTENTION OF BEING THE FIRST TO ***SUCCEED*** IN THE ***GATHERING.***

AND WHEN ***I DO,*** THERE WILL BE NO ONE ***LEFT*** TO EVER ATTEMPT IT AGAIN!

AND, AS THESE WORDS ARE SPOKEN...

... NOT SO VERY FAR AWAY...

HE DIDN'T LEAVE THE STORE.

BUT HE CAN'T BE ***HIDING*** ANYWHERE, EVEN IN THIS ***MESS.***

HIS ***MOLTEN*** BODY WOULD ***IGNITE*** ANYTHING IT TOUCHES, AND THE FIRES WOULD START AGAIN.

SO... IF HE DIDN'T COME OUT THE OTHER SIDE...

... AND HE CAN'T BE ***HIDING...***

... HE MUST HAVE TAKEN ***ANOTHER WAY OUT!***

AND HERE IT IS!

HE'S MELTING HIS WAY ***DOWN*** AND OUT!

HE'S HEADING FOR THE ***SEWERS*** UNDER THE STREETS!

MAN, WHAT A ***STENCH!***

THIS PLACE SMELLS WORSE THAN ***J. JONAH JAMESON'S*** GYM SOCKS!

BUT WHERE'S RAXTON?

OF COURSE! IF RAXTON IS WALKING THROUGH THIS ***MUCK,*** HE'LL BE ***VAPORIZING*** IT JUST LIKE HE DID THE WATER FROM THE ***SPRINKLERS!***

ALL I HAVE TO DO IS ***FOLLOW*** THE ***STEAM!***

Uh-hh!

STARTING TO GET HOTTER'N A SWEDISH SAUNA IN HERE!

THESE TUNNELS ***CONTAIN*** ALL THE ***HEAT*** FROM THE MOLTEN MAN'S STEAM.

MUST BE... CLOSE TO... ***TWO HUNDRED DEGREES*** IN HERE!

CAN'T TAKE... MUCH MORE... OF THIS...

AND... WON'T BE... ABLE TO DO MUCH... AGAINST RAXTON... IF I CATCH UP TO HIM... IN ***THIS SHAPE!***

NO GOOD...

'NOTHER MINUTE OR TWO... AND I'LL ***PASS OUT*** FROM THE ***HEAT!***

GOTTA... GET BACK ONTO... THE STREET. SOMEWHERE... COOL!

SOMEWHERE... I CAN... *THINK!*

Oh, NO!

ARK

THERE'S A *TRUCK* PARKED ON THE MANHOLE COVER!

CAN'T GO BACK... THE WAY... I CAME.

WOULDN'T... LAST ANOTHER *MINUTE* IN... THAT *HEAT.*

FEELING... PRETTY *WEAK* AND *DIZZY...*

DON'T KNOW IF... I HAVE... THE... *COORDINATION* TO DO THIS... WITHOUT *TIPPING* THE TRUCK *OVER...*

PARK

OOR
TORE

BUT I HAVE TO *TRY!*

HOLY SPIT!

SPIDER-MAN!

MADE IT!

WHERE THE *HECK* DID *HE* COME FROM?

ROSES

FLORIST

WELL, ONE DAY A *MOMMY SPIDER* AND A *DADDY SPIDER* FELL VERY MUCH IN *LOVE*...

BUT I DON'T REALLY HAVE TIME TO TELL YOU GUYS ABOUT THE *BIRDS* AND THE *BEES* RIGHT NOW...

NOW THAT MY *BRAIN* IS *WORKING* AGAIN, I HAVE TO FIND RAXTON!

"AND TO DO THAT, I'M GOING TO NEED MORE THAN MY SPIDER-ABILITIES!

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MAPS

COMICS

GOSSIP

"I'M GONNA NEED A *MAP!*

NOW, LET'S SEE...

ACCORDING TO THE FIRST NEWS REPORT I HEARD, RAXTON STARTED HIS LITTLE *STROLL* HERE...

... AND I PICKED UP HIS TRAIL *HERE.*

WHICH MEANS IF HE'S CONTINUING ON A *STRAIGHT LINE* UNDERGROUND...

... I CAN MAYBE *FIND* HIM AGAIN IF I *BACKTRACK* FROM THE *FURTHEST POINT* HE CAN GO...

AND THAT WOULD BE...

"... *THERE!*"

HURRY! Oh, DO HURRY! WE'VE WASTED SO MUCH *TIME* ON THIS *BOAT.*

WE HAD NO *CHOICE.* WE HAD TO GET OUT OF *FRANCE...*

... BUT ALL THE *AIRPORTS* WERE BEING *WATCHED.*

I'M NOT EVEN *CONVINCED* THIS OLD *TRAMP STEAMER* WAS ABLE TO GET US OUT OF *COLOGNE* WITHOUT *SOMEONE* KNOWING WE WERE ABOARD!

AND, AS IF A CRUEL FATE SEEKS TO MOCK THE WORDS OF JOE ROBERTSON...

Oh!

THE MOLTEN MAN!

HOLD ON THERE, RAXTON! WHAT...

UNGH!

EEEK!

HELP ME!

SOMEBODY! PLEASE HELP ME!

Uhh-rrh...

WHAT HIT...?

THE MOLTEN MAN! AND HE'S AFTER ALISON!

PLEASE! DON'T HURT ME!
WHAT HAVE I *DONE* TO YOU? I DON'T EVEN *KNOW* YOU!
NO...
... BUT YOU'VE BOTH HAD THE SAME *BOSS!*
AND I CAN'T BELIEVE THAT'S JUST A *COINCIDENCE!*
UNGH!
OH... KAY...
THAT MAY HAVE BEEN SOMETHING *LESS* THAN MY MOST *BRILLIANT* CAREER MOVE...
I'M *CORNERED.*
NO WAY *BACK,* NO WAY *AROUND...*

NOT SO ***FAST*** THERE, RAXTON!

DON'T YOU REALIZE HOW LONG IT WOULD TAKE ***J. JONAH JAMESON*** TO TRAIN ANOTHER ***EDITOR*** AS GOOD AS MY MAN ***ROBBIE ROBERTSON?***

SPIDER-MAN!

OR OL' BLUE EYES TO MY ***BESTEST*** FRIENDS.

WHICH WOULD ***NOT*** INCLUDE ***YOU,*** RAXTON, OL' BUD! I THOUGHT YOU'D GONE ***STRAIGHT!***

LUCKY I TOOK THE TIME TO WHIP UP A BATCH OF ***EXTRA FLAME RESISTANT WEBBING*** BEFORE I HEADED OUT THIS MORNING.

IT MIGHT HAVE GIVEN RAXTON ALMOST AN ***HOUR*** HEAD START...

... BUT WITHOUT IT, I'D BE THE ***POST TOASTIES*** OF SUPERHEROES!

I CAN ***FEEL*** THE MOLTEN MAN'S ***HEAT*** EVEN THROUGH THE WEBBING I SPRAYED ON THE ***SOLES*** OF MY ***BOOTS.***

NOW I HAVE TO TAKE RAXTON DOWN ***FAST***...

... BEFORE HIS ***SLAG*** SETS THIS WHOLE ***PLACE*** ON ***FIRE!***

I NEVER THOUGHT I'D BE SO GLAD TO SEE THAT ***WALL-CRAWLER*** AGAIN!

ALISON -- ARE YOU ALL RIGHT?

FINE. I'M FINE. BUT WE HAVE TO GET AWAY FROM HERE.

WE HAVE TO FIND ***PETER PARKER.***

BUT -- BUT SPIDER-MAN JUST ***SAVED*** US! WE CAN'T JUST ***LEAVE*** HIM!

THEN YOU ***STAY,*** AND I WILL FIND PARKER ON MY OWN!

I HAVE NO USE FOR ***SPIDER-MAN!***

ALL RIGHT -- YOU'LL NEVER FIND ***PETER*** ON YOUR OWN. NOT IF YOUR ***TIMETABLE*** IS RIGHT.

I'LL GO ***WITH*** YOU. BUT ONLY BECAUSE IT'S AN EMERGENCY.

THEN ***HURRY! HURRY!***

MY TIMETABLE ***IS*** RIGHT! WE HAVE ***VERY LITTLE*** TIME!

HEY, WAY TO BE ***GRATEFUL,*** ROBBIE!

JUST LEAVE ME TO GET MY KEISTER ***COOKED*** ON YOUR BEHALF!

Oh, NO!

THIS IS JUST WHAT I WAS ***AFRAID*** OF!

I SHOULD HAVE ***LURED*** RAXTON OUT ONTO THE ***CONCRETE*** PAVEMENT! ON THESE WOODEN FLOORS...

LOOK OUT!

WE'RE GOING ***THROUGH!***

STEAM AGAIN!

AND I'M GONNA NEED A ***TETANUS SHOT*** AFTER ***THIS!***

THEY HAVEN'T CLEANED UP THE RIVER ***THAT MUCH!***

CAN'T SEE A SIGN OF RAXTON...

...BUT SOMETHING IS ***PULLING*** AT ME...

...YIKES!

DID SOMEBODY PUT SPIDER-MAN ***PATE*** ON THE MENU?!

IF I GET ***SUCKED*** INTO THOSE ***SCREWS*** I'LL BE ***MINCED!*** THERE WON'T BE ENOUGH LEFT TO PUT IN A ***BAGGIE*** AND ***BURY!***

IF THERE WAS EVER A TIME I NEEDED THAT TRADEMARK ***PROPORTIONAL STRENGTH*** OF A ***SPIDER***, THIS WOULD BE ***IT!***

THOUGH I DON'T REMEMBER IF SPIDERS ARE SUPPOSED TO BE GOOD ***SWIMMERS!***

RAXTON!

DID HE GET SUCKED INTO THE PROP, OR...

...NO WAY TO TELL.

NO ***BLOOD*** ON THE WATER -- BUT I'M NOT SURE THERE WOULD BE!

NO TRACE OF RAXTON. NO WAY TO KNOW WHY HE WAS AFTER ROBBIE AND THAT WOMAN.

ONLY ***ONE THING*** I CAN BE ***SURE*** OF. ONE THING I KNOW IN MY ***GUT.***

"AND THAT'S **WHO** HE MUST HAVE BEEN **WORKING FOR!**"

THE OFFICE OF NORMAN OSBORN, SEVENTEEN MINUTES LATER.

THE PHONE. YOU'LL EXCUSE ME FOR A MOMENT, MAXWELL...

OSBORN. WHAT IS YOUR **REPORT?**

THE MISSION **FAILED.** THE **PROJECTILE** MISSED THE **TARGET.**

AND THE **WEAPON?** WHAT HAPPENED TO **HIM?**

UNKNOWN. HE APPEARS TO HAVE BEEN **KILLED,** BUT I CANNOT BE **SURE.**

BE SURE!

MY **APOLOGIES** FOR THE **INTERRUPTION,** MAXWELL.

A **SORDID** LITTLE **BUSINESS** MATTER.

I'M SURE...

NOW -- MORE *IMPORTANT* MATTERS.

TO *RISK ALL* THAT ONE MIGHT *GAIN ALL.*

BUT THERE IS ONLY *ONE* SHARD ALREADY HERE, Mr. OSBORN. DIDN'T YOU SAY YOU HAD *TWO?*

YES, I HAVE HAD THE CENTRAL ELEMENT IN MY POSSESSION FOR SOME TIME.

IT IS IN A *SAFE PLACE,* AND WILL BE *BROUGHT HERE* WHEN THE *OTHER* PIECES ARE SET INTO THE *PATTERN.*

AND YOU *FULLY UNDERSTAND* WHAT WILL *HAPPEN* THEN?

DON'T *INSULT* ME, MAXWELL. I'M NOT A *FOOL.* I UNDERSTAND *ALL* OF IT.

AND I MEAN TO SEIZE FROM THE *GATHERING* THE *ULTIMATE POWER.*

AND YOU'RE NOT THE *FIRST,* OSBORN.

BUT WHAT ABOUT THE *OTHER "GIFTS". POWER* IS ONLY *ONE.* AND ALONGSIDE, *KNOWLEDGE* AND *IMMORTALITY.*

BUT THE OTHER "GIFTS" ARE **DEATH** AND **MADNESS.**

DO YOU REALLY UNDERSTAND THAT YOUR CHANCE IS **TWO** IN **FIVE** OF DYING OR BEING DRIVEN **INSANE?**

OF COURSE I DO, MAXWELL. IF YOU KNOW AS MUCH ABOUT THE **GATHERING OF FIVE** AS YOU CLAIM...

...YOU KNOW THAT THE **ENCHANTMENT** WILL NOT **WORK** UNLESS ALL **FIVE** COME **VOLUNTARILY.**

INCLUDING THE **ONE** WHO INITIATES THE **GATHERING.**

AND IF THE ONE WHO DOES SO **LACKS** THE **PUREST** OF **MOTIVES...**

...YOU UNDERSTAND, DO YOU, THAT THE **GIFTS** ARE NEVER QUITE WHAT THEY **SEEM** TO BE.

POWER, IMMORTALITY, KNOWLEDGE, MADNESS AND DEATH -- ALL THESE THINGS WEAR **MANY** GUISES.

HE WHO GAINS THE **GIFT** HE **CRAVES** MAY FIND IT, IN THE END, MORE A **CURSE** THAN A **BLESSING!**

THE **GATHERING OF FIVE** DRAWS CLOSER.
THE **FINAL CHAPTER** UNFOLDS AT AN EVER-**QUICKENING** PACE.
OUR TALE CONTINUES IN THE PAGES OF PETER PARKER: SPIDER-MAN #96

DO YOURSELF A FAVOR, **TRUE BELIEVER!** **DO NOT MISS IT!**

Shadowcat